

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15
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CEQ-01 ACDA-07 TRSE-00 AGRE-00 EUR-12 DOTE-00
FMC-01 CG-00 /102 W
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FM AMEMBASSY PORT LOUIS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L PORT LOUIS 0390

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT PFOR ECON MP SE
SUBJECT: MAURITIUS WEEKLY REVIEW - APRIL 15

REF: PORT LOUIS 363

SUMMARY: PORT LOUIS 389 PROVIDES A SUMMARY OF THIS CABLE.
END SUMMARY

1. SEYCHELLES PRIME MINISTER ALBERT RENE MADE AN OFFICIAL VISIT TO MAURITIUS APRIL 11 TO 15. WHEN THE OFFICIAL VISIT ENDED HE DECIDED TO STAY AN ADDITIONAL TWO DAYS PRIVATELY. HE WAS ACCORDED FULL PROTOCOL TREATMENT, ALTHOUGH A NUMBER OF MAJOR FIGURES IN THE GOVERNMENT WERE ABSENT DURING MOST OF THE VISIT, INCLUDING PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM, FOREIGN MINISTER WALTER, AGRICULTURE MINISTER BOOLELL AND EDUCATION MINISTER JAGATSINGH. FINANCE MINISTER RINGADOO LED THE MAURITIAN SIDE IN TWO DAYS OF TALKS WITH RENE AND HIS COLLEAGUES, THE JUSTICE MINISTER AND THE AGRICULTURE MINISTER. A COMMUNIQUE PUBLISHED APRIL 15 MENTIONED THE LAW OF THE SEA, FISHERIES, BOUNDARY DELIMITATION, CONSERVATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AS THE PRINCIPAL SUBJECTS DISCUSSED (TEXT OF COMMUNIQUE REPORTED CONFIDENTIAL

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IN PORT LOUIS 386). THE TALKS WERE FRIENDLY AND NOT AT DISPUTATIOUS. RENE ALSO HAD A GOOD DEAL OF CONTACT WITH PAUL BERENGER AND OTHER LEADERS OF THE MAURITIAN MILITANT MOVEMENT (MMM), WITH WHOM HE IS CONSIDERED TO BE MORE IDEOLOGICALLY CONGENIAL THAN WITH THE LABOR PARTY WHICH CONTROLS THE MAURITIAN GOVERNMENT.

2. THERE WAS VERY LITTLE PUBLIC CAMPAIGNING EVIDENT FOR THE APRIL 24 MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. IN AN OPEN LETTER PUBLISHED APRIL 14 PMSD LEADER GAETAN DUVAL RENEWED HIS APPEAL TO THE VOTERS NOT TO LET SLIP THIS "LAST CHANCE" TO DEFEAT THE COMMUNISTS AT THE POLLS. HE ACCUSED THE MMM OF HAVING ENGAGED IN A CONSPIRACY TO DESTROY CONFIDENCE IN ORDER TO WRECK THE ECONOMY, CREATE INSTABILITY AND DISCOURAGE FOREIGN INVESTORS, SO THAT THEY CAN TAKE POWER. HE BLAMED THE FACT THAT THE MMM WON NEARLY 50 PERCENT OF THE SEATS IN DECEMBER WITH ONLY 38 PERCENT OF THE VOTE ON AN "ABERRATION IN THE DEFECTIVE ELECTORAL SYSTEM."

3. DUVAL AND RINGADOO APPEARED TOGETHER AT A COALITION RALLY IN CUREPIPE ON APRIL 14. RINGADOO APPEALED TO THE "SILENT MAJORITY" TO USE THEIR VOTING STRENGTH AND NOT TO ABSTAIN. DUVAL CHAGRED THAT THE MMM SPEAKS SEVERAL LANGUAGES, ADJUSTING ITS APPEAL TO THE AUDIENCE ADDRESSED. HE ALSO APPEALED TO VOTERS TO GO TO THE POLLS, AS ABSTENTIONS WOULD HELP THE MMM. (COMMENT: LABOR AND THE PMSD ARE GOING TO CONCENTRATE ON A GET-OUT-THE-VOTE CAMPAIGN TO COUNTERACT APATHY DURING THE WEEK PRIOR TO THE APRIL 24 ELECTIONS. END COMMENT.)

4. THE CONGRESS OF THE LABOR PARTY, WHICH WAS TO HAVE BEEN HELD APRIL 17, HAS BEEN POSTPONED UNTIL MAY 29 AFTER THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. (COMMENT: THE ANNOUNCED REASON FOR THE POSTPONEMENT WAS THE ABSENCE FROM THE COUNTRY AT THE SCHEDULED TIME OF PRIME MINISTER RAMGOOLAM, FOREIGN MINISTER WALTER AND AGRICULTURE MINISTER BOOLELL. ANOTHER REASON MAY HAVE BEEN THE WISH TO AVOID AN INTERNECINE STRUGGLE OVER THE CONFIDENTIAL

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FUTURE LEADERSHIP AND POLICIES OF THE PARTY JUST BEFORE THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS. END COMMENT)

5. IN A SIGNED EDITORIAL IN LE MILITANT, THE MMM SECRETARY GENERAL, PAUL BERENGER, DENIED THE CHARGE MADE BY ANOTHER PAPER FRIENDLY TO THE MMM THAT THE PARTY HAS TURNED LEFTWARD RECENTLY. WHILE THE PARTY BELIEVES IN PLURALISM, THE EXISTENCE OF ORGANIZED FACTIONS IS FORBIDDEN, TO PREVENT THE PARTY FROM BREAKING UP. THUS THERE IS NO "ORGANIZED" LEFTIST FACTION, BERENGER SAYS. HE ADMITS THE LEFT WING OF THE PARTY IS ANXIOUS BECAUSE THE PARTY, AS IT APPROACHES THE DAY WHEN IT WILL TAKE POWER, HAS HAD TO BECOME MORE CAUTIOUS, REASSURING AND "GOVERNMENTAL". IT IS STILL FULLY COMMITTED TO ITS PROGRAM, BERENGER SAYS, BUT ACCEPTS THE IDEA THAT IT WILL HAVE TO BE ACHIEVED IN STAGES RATHER THAN OVERNIGHT. THE MORE MODERATE TONE THE MMM HAS TAKEN RECENTLY IS DELIBERATE, AND IS DESIGNED TO ATTRACT MIDDLE CLASS SUPPORT AND TO APPEAL TO THE "FORMER" ELECTORATE OF THE LABOR PARTY AND THE PMSD. THE PARTY'S COMMITMENT TO CREATE A TRULY SOCIALIST SOCIETY REMAINS UNCHANGED,

THE LEADER SAYS.

6. BERENGER'S RESPONSE TO CHARGES THAT THE MMM "TAKES OFFENSE" AT ANY CRITICISM OF THE SOVIET UNION WAS REPORTED IN PORT LOUIS 381 (NOTAL).

7. IN A FOLLOW-UP ARTICLE BERENGER, WHILE NOT RULING OUT COMPLETELY THE POSSIBILITY OF A FUTURE COALITION OF THE MMM WITH THE LABOR PARTY (BUT NEVER THE PMSD), SAID THERE IS NO CHANCE OF A "RAPPROCHEMENT" BETWEEN THE TWO PARTIES TODAY BECAUSE LABOR HAS VEERED TO THE RIGHT AND HAS BECOME THE DEFENDER OF THE CAPITALIST SYSTEM. BERENGER SAID THE MMM IS INTERESTED IN TAKING POWER ONLY TO BRING ABOUT A FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE IN MAURITIUS (THE DISMANTLING OF CAPITALISM) AND NOT JUST TO BECOME ANOTHER LABOR PARTY WHICH PRETENDS TO BE SOCIALIST BUT REALLY ISN'T. AFTER POINTING TO THE SUPPORT FOR NATIONALIZATION BY SOME YOUNGER ELEMENTS OF LABOR, BERENGER PREDICTED THAT
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WITH THE DEPARTURE OF RAMGOOLAM THE LABOR PARTY WILL BREAK UP AND DISAPPEAR.

8. THE JOINT ECONOMIC COMMITTEE (JEC), A BODY OF THE MAURITIAN PRIVATE SECTOR, ANNOUNCED THIS WEEK THAT IT HAS CONTRACTED WITH THE FRENCH PUBLIC OPINION FIRM SOFRES TO CONDUCT "SOCIO-ECONOMIC SURVEY" IN MAURITIUS. INTRODUCING THE SOFRES REPRESENTATIVES AT A PRESS CONFERENCE, THE JEC SAID THE SURVEY HAS NO CONNECTION WITH ANY POLITICAL PARTY, IS FINANCED ENTIRELY BY THE JEC, AND WILL SEEK OPINIONS OF MAURITIANS IN THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DOMAINS, FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR, TO ASSIST IT TO ADAPT ITSELF TO THE EVOLUTION OF MAURITIAN LIFE AND TO DETERMINE ITS PRIORITIES. A THOUSAND PERSONS WILL BE ASKED TO RESPOND TO A 40 QUESTION INTERVIEW. THOUGH NOTHING WAS SAID ABOUT PUBLICATION, THE RESULTS WILL PRESUMABLY BE MADE PUBLIC. THE SURVEY WILL BE FINISHED IN JUNE.

9. INFLATION CONTINUES TO MOUNT AT A RATE HIGHER THAN LAST YEAR'S. THE CONSUMER PRICE INDEX ROSE ONE PERCENT FROM JANUARY TO FEBRUARY, FOLLOWING A NEARLY TWO PERCENT RISE BETWEEN DECEMBER AND JANUARY. A PRINCIPAL CAUSE OF THE LATEST RISE WAS THE GOVERNMENT-DECREED INCREASE IN BUS FARES.

10. THE MARINE AUTHORITY HAS ANNOUNCED THAT THE RATE OF DOCKWORKER ABSENTEEISM HAS BEEN REDUCED TO A NEGLIGIBLE LEVEL, WHICH HAS PERMITTED THE PORT TO REACH A NEARLY NORMAL LEVEL OF OPERATIONS. THE WAITING PERIOD FOR SHIPS AT THE PORT PRIOR TO UNLOADING HAS BEEN REDUCED TO FIVE DAYS OR LESS. THE AUTHORITY HOPES THE IMPROVEMENT IN THE SITUATION WILL LEAD TO A LIFTING OF SURCHARGES ON FREIGHT DESTINED FOR

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